DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 394 FL 801 093

TITLE	L'alphabetisation et les femmes (Women and Literacy) Round Table (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, June 17-20, 1991). English Translation.
INSTITUTION	Ontario Dept. of Education, Toronto.
PUB DATE	Jun 91
NOTE	23p.; For related documents, see FL 801 092-094.
AVAILABLE FROM	Literacy Section, Workplace Preparation Division, 625 Church St., 3rd Floor, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2E8, Canada, (includes roundtable videotape).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; Daily Living Skills; Females; Foreign Countries; *French; French Canadians; Illiteracy; *Literacy Education; *Native Language Instruction; Personal Narratives; Self Esteem; Sex Differences; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Canada; *Francophone Education (Canada)

ABSTRACT

The transcript (translated into English) of a roundtable discussion of literacy among francophone women in Canada begins with the personal narrative of one women who gained literacy skills as an adult. The panel of three specialists in francophone women's literacy in Canada then look at the literacy rate among Canadian women, and the demand for and objectives of literacy education for this group. Three disadvantages of Canadian francophone women are noted: a high rate of illiteracy; minority language; and gender discrimination. An additional problem is seen in the fact that literacy education programs further the inequities by creating low-paying jobs for women. Difficulties in promoting literacy instruction also include geographic distances, lack of child care facilities, and scheduling for literacy students and for literacy teacher trainees. Panelists make recommendations and offer directions for future literacy training efforts for francophone women in Canada. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 391 394

L'alphabétisation et les femmes

English translation

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Elizabeth S Butterworth

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Colloque national

L'alphabétisation des adultes : questions et options

Toronto 17- 20 juin 1991

Une production Analogue/Entraide budgétaire

Pour la Direction de l'alphabétisation Ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario

FL 801093

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Ontario

Ministry of Government Services
Government Translation Service

Tel.: (416) 965-2891
Fax: (416) 965-8238

7th Floor
Ferguson Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1N3

Ministère des Services gouvernementaux
Service de traduction du gouvernement

Tél.: (416) 965-2891
Télécopieur: (416) 965-8238

Édifice Ferguson
7e étage
Queen's Park
Toronto (Ontario)
M7A 1N3

TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH REF. A 41761/EDU

ROUND TABLE

WOMEN AND LITERACY

INTRODUCTION : TESTIMONIES OF LEARNERS

It's interesting. We are not the only ones with problems like this. It's encouraging because we see that we want to help each other, and then, there are people there to help us.

I feel at ease, because I can read and write. I am at ease. I can tell myself, well, you did it. You can write and you can read. You don't need others to read your letters for you. You can read yourself.

I wasn't only a mother who could do the laundry, cook, and do that. I had done other things for my children. For their education. And I said to myself, but I should leave my thoughts, things for my children. So I went back to literacy training and I am learning again to write things that are interesting for my children to read, and my grandchildren. So that's it. It gives me renewed value as a woman because I have never worked outside the home.

Well, I had my three children and I wanted to look after them first. I raised my three children, then I said to myself, I'll see what happens later on. Then I decided to return after my three children had been raised. It's my turn now! I waited for it!

I have always worked. My working companions never noticed I couldn't read or write. Because I didn't need to. I was working. I was laid off. I went to the unemployment office and tried to fill out the form. I had a hard time. I told the woman I didn't know how to read or write, but that I had always worked regardless of that. She thought that was a good one. She said to me : "If you like, I'll write down a name and address for you", then she added : "You're going to take correspondence courses". But I said : "How am I going to do that ? I can't write". She said : "I'm going to write it down for your husband". So I got home and my husband tore up the paper! Because he felt I wouldn't have been able to do it. He knew me : he didn't think I was capable of it.

I never liked school. Because there were emotional problems at home, and then when I went to school, I wasn't able to concentrate or work like a normal kid. I was afraid of what was happening at home, always. I was there physically, but mentally I was back home.

Jean Fugère : Hello, I'm Jean Fugère. The topic we are discussing at our Round Table today is, "Women and Literacy".

To start with, we might think that the topic has attracted a lot of attention, that it has prompted lots of studies and projects. After all, since the beginnings of literacy training, women have on the whole been present among both literacy workers and learners.

The reality is that, except for the Réseau national action-éducation des femmes, no agency has taken the time to examine the particular characteristics of illiteracy among French-speaking women.

In May 1989, this network organized a major meeting on literacy for French-Canadian women, and took stock of the needs expressed by the participating women.

So what needs and aspirations do women have ? Well, this is what we are going to try to see in the company of our guests.

The first, Hélène Dallaire, a Quebecker who has been living in Ontario for the past 25 years, is president of the Réseau national action-éducation des femmes.

Hélène Dallaire : Hello.

Jean Fugère : Murielle Gagné-Ouellette, a Franco-Manitoban, director of Pluri-elles, a women's organization in Manitoba.

Murielle Gagné-Ouellette : Hello.

Jean Fugère : Henriette Lapointe, a Franco-Ontarian, a resource person for Francophone literacy in Ontario from the very beginning.

Henriette Lapointe : Hello

Jean Fugère : And finally, Pierre LeBlanc, a Franco-Saskatchewan, university professor and facilitator, who has helped train literacy workers with the Regroupement populaire de l'Ontario.

Pierre LeBlanc : Hello.

Jean Fugère : Hélène Dallaire, first question. According to Statistics Canada in a report that came out in May 1990, the percentage of men and women in Canada experiencing reading and writing problems is apparently pretty well the same. We are told it is 38% of the population. Does this mean that the men's groups and women's groups should be considered in the same way ? Or do they have specific needs ?

Hélène Dallaire : I think that the groups indeed have specific needs and shouldn't be considered in the same way. It's true that the Statistics Canada survey shows that both men and women are illiterate ...that there is no difference between men and women. On the other hand, there are other studies that show us that if we are look at the French-speaking community, the Francophone women are not as well off as the English-speaking women.

When we see that in Canada, close to 50% of Francophone women don't have secondary schooling, that only a minority of them go on to university, that they have far less schooling than the men, well personally, I am not prepared to accept that illiteracy is equivalent for men and women!

Jean Fugère : You say in effect that the women in Canada have less schooling than the men. Does this mean, then, that there are greater needs among the women than among the men ? There appears to be a difference there already. Henriette ?

Henriette Lapointe : Yes, What happens also is that they have only considered the active population. So, from their vantage point, they are thinking of literacy only in terms of the active population for the purpose of a paid job. They don't take into consideration the quality of life within it. And then they don't take

into consideration either the whole view of the literacy movement in general, that it is a way of having control.

Jean Fugère : It is taking things in hand. It is, as you say, having control, the need for autonomy. But I'll come back to that ...Do we need to view the needs of women as different, that we need to take this as our starting point when we talk about literacy training?

Hélène Dallaire : I think this is fundamental. Because we tend to think that the problem of literacy, in the country, is a woman's problem. It is not a woman's problem! I think it is a social problem. And if, indeed, we want women to be able to develop their autonomy and quality of life, I think we should offer them an approach that will be respectful of their experience - which differs greatly from that of a man, in this country.

So what I see around me, on the whole, are women who are in literacy training. And I say, my God, would men hold up under conditions like these ? Just look at how little is available to them! And they hold up! They don't give up. I see women who are determined, proud, who want to get out of this situation!

On the other hand, I also see injustices against women. They work with learning materials that are barely developed at all, especially if they are French-speaking. They work with what is available. They don't have the same opportunities! Think of the arrangements they have to make to be able to attend their literacy class - they have to depend on the neighbour to look after the kids because they can't afford a babysitter.

I also see that the reception or welcoming structures aren't there! And if they are there, they are not adapted to specific needs, to the majority who are at present seeking literacy training in the community, namely the women!

Jean Fugère : So let's see what there really is available, for the women. You say that their experiences are different. How ? Let's take some concrete examples ... Murielle, you have a literacy group in Manitoba. What are the women's specific literacy needs ?

Murielle Gagné-Ouellette : Well, their needs are rather ... most of the women acquire literacy skills specifically to help their children, at home. So the need is more real. Whereas for the man, when he gets literacy training, most of the time it is for a promotion at work.

Jean Fugère : We'll ask you a question, one which I think is quite important too. We know there is a trend today - well, we feel it at the government level - to stress literacy in the work place.
Isn't this a problem ? Isn't this being done to the detriment of women who might want to better their quality of life but not necessarily have a career ?

Murielle Gagné-Ouellette : Precisely ... For me, the woman is the heart of the family and community. Because she is the one who, most of the time, is going to help the children to continue their studies. So it is these children who are going to move into the other fields and make the economy function.

Jean Fugère : You are well placed to know this because you have trained literacy facilitators. And statistics tell us, I think, that 95% of the facilitators are women. This is nevertheless astonishing! This means that this gives a special colour to the instruction given.

Pierre Leblanc : I think that if we come back to the definition of illiteracy, just what is it? It is being pushed to the side, it is the complete or almost complete lack of control. And in this sense, women suffer a double penality. They have suffered the

concept of being pushed to the side at the level of control because they are women; and often, of course, because they are also illiterate, etc.

In this sense, they have a far greater capacity; they have developed their instincts, the necessary resiliance to get to the end of the literacy process. Men tend to drop out a lot faster, to become discouraged in this process.

Hélène Dallaire : Pierre, a minute ago, said that women are at a double disadvantage. But I'd go even further and say that Francophone women are at a triple disadvantage, because this country's Francophones - and this has been shown by three studies : the '86 census, the Statistics Canada survey, the Southam survey in '87 - have half the amount of schooling the Anglophones have. So this is a heavy mortgage!

Jean Fugère : Are there any specific causes for this ?

Hélène Dallaire : There are some causes that come immediately to mind after consulting with a group of illiterate Francophone women outside Quebec. They told us that there are family causes, social causes, economic causes. But as for the family causes, it is a fact that education, especially for the French-Canadians, was the prerogative of the boys far more than the girls. So in the big families, the boys were the

ones first given priority. And the girls, well, they were there to look after the family, raise the children, etc. And you didn't need B.A.s to do that! And the men, well, they're there to earn a living, etc. So ...

Jean Fugère : Education is not held in great esteem by women, to start with.

Hélène Dallaire : It wasn't, but it is beginning to be so. But it is a long process, a very very long one.

Jean Fugère : Do the women in their own community suffer also from, say, unacceptance ? I think that the women who feel this need to learn may have a husband who doesn't want them to, or their immediate entourage doesn't favour it.

Henriette Lapointe :There's more to it than that! There are a lot of single parent families where the mother is the head. Because there, we are talking of women who have husbands. At most they will perhaps end up by subsidizing part of it ...because the menial type of jobs available to women, it's work! And then it's not good. If a specialized worker earned 25 dollars an hour, and double time after eight hours, well, there isn't a single woman who earns that kind of a salary unless she has a university degree.
The statistics show that we're not there!

This means that women are in the menial jobs. Then the single parent women have their little job all day and then try, exhausted in the evening, to feed and look after the kids! And then to pay $5 an hour for a piano lesson on the cardboard keyboard!
So, where is she going to find the time to find her autonomy, and to take control and all that ? She has her nose to the ground! She can't do anything else; she has to look after putting bread on the table for the kids.

So what happens is that in literacy training, 95% of the people there are women because socially, it is part of the traditional way, education, or culture. Culture is always learned on the laps of the women. So here again it is the women who will go because traditionally, education, health and social work are the main areas where women are concentrated.

Jean Fugère : And this has always been the case.

Henriette Lapointe : Yes, What happens in literacy training is that the governments give the funds, which promote a hierarchical structure which in fact runs *counter* to the socialization they received to work more in a group, and things like that. When there is a salary for the coordination of a program, and all the other people have to work as volunteers, this means that this, or the

person coordinating, shares with the others - and that means only peanuts, there isn't enough for everyone - or else, she is obliged to adopt a patriarchal model, so, I am the one running the place and you others, you conduct the business. Well, this means that not everyone can wield authority!

Literacy training has created menial jobs. Because you can't say it's very well paid, when you talk of community literacy programs. If you go into the school system however, that's another story. But in the community sector, it's not very well paid. This means that literacy has created a few low-paying jobs, for a limited number of women, but which make it difficult for everyone to assume control! Because things have been organized so that the funding promotes a patriarchal, hierarchical structure.

Hélène Dallaire : The best example of what Henriette is telling us about is ...let's look at how literacy is funded in Quebec. When literacy training is conducted in a school setting, that is, the general adult education division of the Department of Education, the teachers are paid $35.00 and $40.00 an hour. Whereas when it is community-based literacy training, which is aimed at taking control and taking in hand, the facilitators are either not paid or are paid only $8 to $10 an hour.

So we know that the Department of Education is an excessively hierarchical route. So this impossibility of being able to take oneself in hand is somewhat perpetuated, because everything comes down to us from up above.

Jean Fugère : Pierre, I'd like to ask you ... we're in fact discussing this whole situation in relation to women. As a man working in this area, what does this cause you to question ? And what are your thoughts concerning this situation ?

Pierre LeBlanc : Certainly what this brings me to do is make a series of observations. First, there is a discrepancy between the Government's Speech and its reality. The index for measuring the Government's commitment is the dollar, as Henriette suggested. We will be able to believe in the Government's direction once the Government makes the dollars available to allow literacy to operate. Dollars allocated not just at the level of instructors but also at the level of the support infrastructure.

Jean Fugère : Now then, looking at this from a global point of view, literacy is a very one-shot deal as such : we're talking here of literacy per se. But there's probably a whole system to be set up; I'm thinking here, Murielle, in terms of your area ...

when we talk in terms of women, we're talking transportation, daycare, needs that are not directly related to the classroom or the literacy classroom - in the end [we're talking] in terms of a much more general context. Do you have funding for this ? Are you being ...

Murielle Gagné-Ouellette : No, there's absolutely nothing. Again, as Henriette was saying, they're going to pay the Coordinator of the centre but other than that, you have to try to get by on peanuts! So, indeed, that's why we are having problems. As for us in Manitoba, our reality is a very rural one. Now the rural women can't come into town - we have only one centre - so they have no choice, so what do they do ? They don't become literate!

Jean Fugère : Do you feel ... when you say you could accommodate more in your centre, at Plurielles ? But do you feel that all of that put together prevents you in the end from recruiting more people, whom you could be recruiting ?

Murielle Gagné-Ouellette : It prevents us from recruiting because we don't have enough money to go 40-50 miles every day. We have one person, so we have to start with the training.

Jean Fugère : Yes. It's a problem. The training for the literacy facilitators - for the women literacy facilitators, because that's in fact what it's all about - is it adequate at this time ? Has this been your experience in this area?

Henriette Lapointe: Well, what's happening is that we're talking more and more about training. And obviously, here again it's another pretty pickle! Because if, in fact, we want to maintain the status quo, we'll be asking that the people have academic training, diplomas from the Ministry of Education, so they can give courses in the scholarly fashion of doing things, the hierarchical, patriarchal way of doing things, as always.

But if, at a given moment, we go beyond this, and we recognize a person's acquired skills ... because when one is an adult, we're able to identify these needs. We are able to voice them. Then we are able ... if we are not able to find the answer *on our own* or go and look for it, well, *as a group,* we can ! For example, I have a letter to write, and I want to tell my insurance company that something is wrong, and I don't know how to say this. If I go and see the group and I say, "Look, I'm out of my depth here, can you help me". Well, they write a letter as a group.

It's not five years down the road, when she'll be able to write the letter she needs, it's now! They write the letter together and send it off. And she knows it's well written, because the person wants to do things right ... Or again someone wants to complain about her rent. It's the same thing. Together it can be done! Right away, on the spot! No need to wait until you become literate in five or six or ten years' time.

Helene Dallaire: To get some mileage out of Henriette's and Pierre's comments, the training of the facilitators is important. But if there aren't any learners, we don't need the facilitators! And when Henriette says "we're going to write the letter together", but together, this means the learners and the facilitator ... It's all very well to have beautiful material and all kinds of wonderful gadgets, but if the learner can't get to the learning centre, well then, all will be for naught.

I think accessibility means money for daycare, material, transportation. And also, the value of the activity she has decided to do will have to be promoted, that is, the act of becoming literate.

Jean Fugere: Hélène you do ... excuse me, go ahead Henriette!

Henriette Lapointe: Another problem also is that when you deal with women, you always have to think in terms of the place you want them to come. And not too late either! Because you can't put a literacy centre in a place where the women won't feel safe coming to in the evening, or travelling to.

You know, there are lots of other factors to consider. It's not just that, well, just because it's less expensive downtown, that we're going to locate downtown. Ah, Ah!

Jean Fugère: Based on all of these reasons, if we think in terms of what could be changed in future, what we could actually do to improve the situation. Are there any recommendations to be made ? Is there anything on which we should be working in the future ?

Murielle Gagné-Ouellette : In my view, what would be important would be for the Governments not to set up formal structures. They should be left as open as possible with as many possibilities. Then have a look at caregivers, transportation, the area, and the way the women act!. Because they start from what they have experienced, not what they have learned in school.

Jean Fugère : In other words, be sensitive to the needs of a community and not apply a structure which perhaps does not espouse these needs. Is that it ? Pierre ?

Pierre Leblanc : I think the stakes here are very, very important with regard to the whole question of training. With regard to the stakes for the women, relative to community literacy, there's a danger that the notion of training will be moved from the area of community literacy and women to the institution, and become formalized, such as to essentially close the door, gradually, on community literacy and the liberation of women. The training process must absolutely be done via networks and community literacy groups.

Jean Fugère : If we go ... actually, what will it take, Pierre ? You were saying that to recruit the learners, there are problems right now. What will it actually take, specifically, to do this recruiting ?

Pierre Leblanc : It will take a whole series of things. It will take formal recognition on the part of the governments that community literacy is an essential vehicle for literacy in general and for the literacy of women, in particular.

This formal recognition should be supported by the full range of financial, human, didactic and pedagogical resources.

There should also be a certain record of success : we talk of people who have been on the fringes for years, for generations in many cases, who are not necessarily all that eager to jump in and get wet.

Jean Fugère : Is there not in fact a need for something in the way of awareness in this regard, because we know that often the illiterates don't feel the need to become literate and go look for resources. Is there not a great deal of work to be done here ? Henriette, for example.

Henriette Lapointe :Well in my case, I wouldn't go so far as to say they don't need to do so. It's just that there may perhaps be other more pressing matters in their daily lives which force them to choose other things. Because, with women, what happens, is that if they have to choose between putting bread on the table and learning literacy skills, well look here ... If it's a question of choosing between the children and having peace in the home because the old boy is going to hit the roof, well they're going to opt for peace in the home!

And they pay dearly for this! The women pay dearly for this flexibility, this resiliance we were discussing earlier. They pay very dearly because they ... they are used to putting the needs of others before their own!

Hélène Dallaire : Hence the importance, I think, of coupling the problem of illiteracy with the reality of women. That's basic.

Jean Fugère : But that's not being done right now.

Hélène Dallaire : You don't give literacy training to a woman who is illiterate in the same way you would a man because the expectations and skills are different in our patriarchal society.

Jean Fugère : But this coupling, you refer to, it hasn't been done up to now. That, it's probably a priority on your agenda that we begin doing this, as of now, since what we are hearing is that this hasn't been done up to now.

Hélène Dallaire : It appears, unfortunately, not to have been done. And I don't know if it's because of a lack of goodwill or rather a lack of awareness. One doesn't give much thought to such things, that the reality of women is different from that of men; and so we go on, and then, ah! look here, we'll ...So I don't know what the reason is, but I think there's room to develop, to continue to develop, in any case, approaches specific to the reality of women.

Jean Fugère : Well I think some awareness in any case has taken place today, that in fact tells

us that the needs of women are different and that they are specific.

The ball is now in your court. It's up to you to pursue the discussion and take it a bit further. Thank you for joining us and thank you to our guests.

THE END